

## Watch -chapter 2-

He had slept over at his lover's house and had been planning to sleep in until noon that Saturday. But the sound of a cell phone ringtone caused the man in his arms, Yosuke Matsuoka, to squirm. Matsuoka snatched the cell phone from the bedside table.

"Yes, Matsuoka speaking."

It felt cold when they broke contact, and Motofumi Hirosue pulled the warm bundle back into his arms. Matsuoka hunched his shoulders in a ticklish way.

"Shinozaki? What are you calling about so early in the morning?"

Although Matsuoka said "early", it was already past ten. Hirosue could faintly hear the voice on the other end. Matsuoka's body gradually tensed up at the speaker's overwrought tone.

"And what did you do, then?" Matsuoka snapped. Hirosue, who had his arms around him, was startled at his loud voice.

"Go and apologize to them in person. —They told you not to come? Of course they're going to say that!"

Matsuoka slipped out of Hirosue's arms and left the room, still naked. Hirosue stared in bewilderment at the closed door. The comfortable sleepiness fled in an instant, and now he was wide awake.

Hirosue got out of bed and put on the clothes he had tossed aside yesterday. He picked up Matsuoka's pyjama top before leaving the room. Just as he expected, Matsuoka was standing in the living room, talking with a severe expression on his face.

"It's called showing sincerity. Don't think the stuff under the surface doesn't count."

Hirosue draped the pyjama top over the man's bare back. Matsuoka spun around in surprise, and Hirosue patted his shoulder before going back to the bedroom. He felt like it was better that he stayed out of earshot.

About ten minutes... perhaps fifteen minutes later, Matsuoka opened the bedroom door.

"Sorry about the racket. Thanks for this." He closed his fingers around the front of his pyjama top.

"Is everything alright?" he asked. Matsuoka gave an exasperated smile.

"I have to go to work now. Sorry for doing this to you when you're visiting."

*But today's Saturday*, Hirosue thought, but didn't say so.

"That's okay. Don't worry about me," he said instead. His nose felt itchy. Matsuoka looked colder than him, but it was Hirosue who sneezed three times in a row.

"You alright? Catching a cold?"

Hirosue had had a slight cough before coming out to Tokyo. Matsuoka looked worried, but Hirosue smiled and brushed it off.

"I'm fine, I'm fine," he said.

Matsuoka took a shower and changed into his suit. Even though all he was doing was putting his clothes on, the act of shrouding his nakedness, and the sight of him doing so from behind, seemed very erotic to Hirosue.

Once he adjusted his tie to perfection, Matsuoka turned to him.

"I'll be off, then," he said, touching Hirosue's right hand.

"Have a good day at work."

"I'll call you before I leave for home."

"Sure." Hirosue sneezed right after he answered. Matsuoka walked over to the closet and opened it. He took something out of the top drawer of the chest in the right-hand corner.

"It's over-the-counter cold medicine, but it works. You should start taking this stuff early."

"Th-Thanks."

After passing the small bottle of cold medicine to him, Matsuoka stroked Hirosue's hair one more time, reluctantly, before leaving the house.

Hirosue's colds often dragged on for a long time. He remembered hearing somewhere that cold medicine was more effective taken in the early stages. Hirosue followed the instructions on the label and took three pills of the medicine that Matsuoka had given to him.

He knew where the medicine had been stored because he'd watched Matsuoka take it out. Hirosue approached the closet to put the it back in its place. He opened the top drawer of the chest on the right-hand side and tilted his head. There was no other medication in the neatly-sorted drawer.

He'd thought it had come from the top drawer, but perhaps it was in the second drawer down. No—he was almost sure it was on the top.

He could see a square leather box at the very front. He took it out, wondering if this was Matsuoka's medication box. He took the lid off and gave a wry smile. He had figured since Matsuoka was fashionable, his first aid box would be leather-bound and fashionable, too, but of course, he turned out to be wrong. The box was a watch case.

The only watch that Hirosue used was the one with the blue face that Matsuoka had gotten for him. Matsuoka, on the other hand, didn't seem to be fixated on any one watch, and changed them around based on his outfit. The case was divided into rectangular sections, in which numerous sleek watches were laid neatly beside each other.

Hirosue replaced the lid on the box and put it back inside the drawer. But the box kept tilting diagonally, and did not quite fit. Something was wedged underneath. He felt around the bottom of the drawer and pulled out a thin, wooden, rectangular box. There were beautiful engravings on the front. This looked like a watch case, too.

Hirosue opened it without much thought and exclaimed in surprise.

It was an unfashionable watch, not suited for someone like Matsuoka. The scratched face, the worn and limp leather band—this was his watch; there was no doubt about it.

Last year, he had lost it on the camping trip—or thought he had lost it. What was it doing here?

Had Matsuoka found it and picked it up for him? If so, why hadn't he given it back? Or had he taken it home, thinking it was his own watch?

The wooden box was lined with a soft, velvet-like cloth.

Having the watch in his hand made him recall memories of those days. Matsuoka had left the cabin late at night and not come back. Hirosue had gone looking for him, only to find him sleeping in the car. At the time, he had felt relieved to find Matsuoka, and at the same time, angry.—How about now? He thought about what kind of words he might say to Matsuoka if he had been who he was

now.

Matsuoka came home past two o'clock. Hirosue was aware of the basic gist of things — that Matsuoka's subordinate had gotten into some trouble and that they had gone to apologize to the business partner together. But it was hard for Hirosue to ask him what had happened after that.

Hirosue had only nibbled on a bit of bread after waking up, and Matsuoka had not eaten anything at all. It was a strange hour of the day — too late for lunch and too early for dinner. They both didn't feel like cooking, so they went out to eat instead.

Matsuoka didn't talk much during their meal. He still made some conversation out of consideration for Hirosue, but he seemed to be preoccupied with the problem at his work, and tended to fall silent quickly. This probably wasn't the right time to bring up the watch, Hirosue thought, so he remained silent as well.

After they got back to the apartment, he sensed Matsuoka staring at him.

"What is it?" he asked, but Matsuoka only said, "Nothing."

Hirosue was still curious, so he asked again.

"What is it?"

"I was just wondering if you're angry."

Hirosue was surprised; it certainly wasn't the answer he had been expecting.

"I'm not angry."

"But I left you alone, even though you came all the way here to visit."

Hirosue laughed. "I'm not a kid, so it's fine. Besides, I know you had your own reasons."

When he drew Matsuoka close, the man closed his eyes in relief. Hirosue felt like picking up from where they had left off the night before.

"Can we?" he asked, touching the Matsuoka's fingertips.

"I'll go take a shower," said his lover, looking down with a slight blush under his eyes.

"I'm fine just like this."

Hirosue took the man's warm hand and went inside the bedroom.

They had eaten at a weird time and had sex at a weird time, and by the time the clock ticked past nine, they started to get hungry again.

They lay tangled in bed, talking about such unromantic topics as whether they should order delivery for dinner. But now, Hirosue felt like he could bring it up.

"Thanks for the medicine this morning."

When Hirosue thanked him, Matsuoka placed his palm against Hirosue's forehead.

"You don't have a fever, do you?"

"No, I just had a bit of a cough in the morning. So, the medicine — I wanted to put it back, so I opened the drawer in the closet. And I ended up finding my watch..."

His lover's soft, relaxed face instantly turned rigid.

"I'm... sorry..."

The apology made him realize that Matsuoka had hidden it, fully aware that it was his. Hirosue stroked the man's head.

"I'm not angry. I actually completely forgot I'd lost the watch. The watch I got from you actually feels more familiar now."

"I'm sorry—I'm so sorry." The man continued to apologize even though Hirosue reassured him he wasn't angry. "That time when we went camping, I spotted it when you'd left it behind. I heard it was important to you, so I was meaning to give it back, but..."

Matsuoka curled up and made himself so small, it was almost pitiful to watch. Hirosue kissed away the tears that had begun to form at the corners of his eyes.

"You can keep that watch, Matsuoka."

"But..."

"If you want to keep that old thing, you can have it. So you don't have to hide it anymore."

"Sorry... I'm sorry..."

"It's nothing to cry about."

The watch, unremarkable except for its age, had been set aside from the others and kept in a box much too elegant for its worth.

"Thank you for taking such good care of it," Hirosue whispered into the soft ear of his adorable and piteous lover, who trembled as he wept.